

Thoughts About Writing

I did a lot of my writing over the past couple of years on Substack.

I write memoirs and speculative fiction and also essays and sometimes poetry, song lyrics, stream of consciousness and word collage.

Firstly: The autobiographical bit, fragments of my life, with all the struggles that entails. I try to achieve the same level of honesty which characterised the work of Jack Kerouac. His writing was a little bit too flourishy in places, perhaps, but he always endeavoured to be an honest reporter of events even when that must have been difficult for him. He comes right out and tells us if he's made a mistake or failed to live up to his own expectations. He tells about the times when things go well and also about the other times when things are a mess. I try to describe the events of my life with that kind of honesty. Even when I'm weak and feeble and soft-hearted and slow on the uptake and almost psychotically gullible.

Of course, there is the Marcel Proust problem of remembering accurately or of finding connections between remembered states and the methods for triggering clearer remembering. I strive to at least know the difference between my accurate and honest memories, my vague supposings of what might have happened, my absolute lies and my mixings of dreams and fantasies with a basis of fact. I want to be honest but honesty means including some material which may be delusional or affected by the phenomena of dreams.

I use the name "Speculativism" for good reasons. Speculative reality has more phenomenological dimensions than mundane reality. If you don't believe me please consider this: Father Christmas does not exist and yet he influences people's behaviour every year. Sherlock Holmes was not a real person and yet people's lives change direction when they attempt to emulate Sherlock Holmes' methodology. Similarly Glastonbury and Tintagel and Winchester are what they are and forever more shall be so whether King Arthur be real or fiction or a bit of both.

My Irish grandad was chopping wood in the forest about 120 years ago when he cut his hand and was losing a lot of blood his workmates gave him some whisky and went for a doctor. Sitting there, light headed from the loss of blood and the effects of the whisky he saw all the imps and fairies of the woods come out and dance in a ring.

It doesn't mean they weren't real. Doesn't mean they were real either. But one way or the other it still happened. That's a phenomenon. That's Speculativism.

Secondly, after the autobiographical stuff, there's the total fiction. These are approaching reality from the other direction. I have a backlog of ideas from the days when I went out to work each day in mindless jobs to earn a living and came back home exhausted, did a little bit of art and then fell asleep.

It's good for a writer to have experience of various walks of life. If you've never had a proper job other than being a writer then what can say to the world? Writing about writing is valid

but has serious limitations. On the other hand, remixing material which is already out there is borrowing from someone else's experiences. Endlessly regurgitating Ovid's Metamorphosis combined with Andrew Laing, Roger Zelazny, The Brothers Grimm, Robert Silverberg, Lord Dunsany, Fortean Times and newspaper reports of serial killers and rapists will perhaps only serve to make you a second rate copy of Neil Gaiman (or a first rate copy if you have his charm and skill with words) but to achieve truly great writing like "1984" or "Animal Farm" or "Keep the Aspidochelone Flying" you need real life experiences of hardship and moral struggles. George Orwell and his wife Eileen lived lives which were sometimes wretched and bloody and this was sometimes by choice. Nevertheless they made not only better factual reports but also better fiction as a result. John Steinbeck worked in the vineyards of the Napa Valley and knew the life and the hardships of that world. It matters. Don't just write another knock-off of the Lord of the Rings. Be an Uber driver or a shop assistant, a road sweeper or a customer service advisor, a soldier or a kitchen assistant. Then write something which comes from real experience.

Fiction can be driven by vast cosmic ideas like Michael Moorcock's multiverse of Order versus Chaos versus a Cosmic Balance or older, quasi-religious stories of Good versus Evil. On the other hand, all those heavy moralistic or structuralistic cosmologies can be knocked into a cocked hat by some simple down-to-earth story of individual personalities and eccentric quirks.

I do other things apart from writing. I make audio art and video art. I am a leading expert in playing the guitar badly.

Still, I keep coming back to writing because of the genuine importance of story making in human civilisation. Everything we humans do is a process of narrative construction and deconstruction. Knowing that, we might as well get on with it.